

Newsletter

**News and Resources for
Military and Veterans Affairs
Endorsers and Chaplains**

June 2011

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A publication of the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces (NCMAF)
and the Endorsers Conference for Veterans Affairs Chaplaincies (ECVAC)

**[NCMAF Chaplain Endorser Survey](#)
[For all serving chaplains and CCPOs](#)**

[Click Here !](#)

Chairman's Views

[Letter from NCMAF Chairman Steve Doan](#)

"Educate the people of your constituency about why we have such diversity in our military and federal institutions. Celebrate with them the fact that our troops and civilians can freely exercise their religion without fear!"

Dear Colleagues,

Celebrate diversity! We are one of the few nations in the world or in history that can shout those words with true joy and commitment. At the NCMAF Executive Committee meeting in February we considered a new brochure highlighting our celebration of diversity and how this may impact the ministry of the chaplains endorsed by members of our conference. The quote above (from the brochure draft) highlights but one reason why this celebration is important to us – it permits all those who serve in our military, both uniformed and civilian, to exercise their religious beliefs without fear.

As much as we rejoice in our diversity however, celebrating it is not always easy. The celebration can get very complicated when we delve down to the nuts and bolts. Diversity means difference and difference may mean conflict. When living in community not everyone gets to have it their way all the time as other members of that same community have differing ways. This is an incontrovertible fact. The issue we face then is how do we maintain community, celebrate diversity, and still remain true to our own beliefs while we respect the beliefs of others.

As we celebrate diversity as a nation we also face struggles and controversy in working out the celebration in our daily lives. For example, a struggle facing us today is how to celebrate diversity in the face of questions regarding repeal of DADT. The current DoD process of preparing for open service by gays in the military ranks is only part of the issue. The larger issue is how we understand this diversity as a nation and how we respond to it while being able to freely exercise our religious beliefs without fear.

NCMAF and ECVAC are communities which have come together to assist our members in recruiting, endorsing, and providing oversight for civilian clergypersons who desire to serve as chaplains in all branches of the military and Veterans Affairs hospitals. While we have no theological or faith requirements for membership, we recognize significant and fundamental differences exist in the beliefs of our members. And yet we celebrate our diversity, we have no fear in our fellowship, and we value our community.

As the discussion regarding possible implementation of the new military policy progresses, our members find themselves on differing sides of the issue. The debate will likely proceed for some time as it is a continuation of a debate which reaches far in our history. During this debate NCMAF's position is advocacy that all of our service members can reasonably exercise their religion without fear. I pledge myself to this role and encourage all of our members to do the same as we maintain our community and celebrate our diversity without fear.

Collegially,
Steve Doan



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NCMAF

"Professionalism demands that veteran chaplains continue their efforts to advance the theory and praxis of institutional ministry long after their retirement."
Rev. Dr. Louis V. Iasiello,
OFM, Ph. D.
[NCMAF Keynote Address](#)

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Letter from ECVAC Chairman John Murdoch

Dear Colleagues,

Recently I became aware of a new book entitled "[When Johnny and Jane Come Marching Home: How All of Us Can Help Veterans](#)" by [Paula J. Caplan](#). I was struck by the subject matter and its relevancy to the challenge each of us faces – how do we welcome home our veterans and take care of them and their families. Caplan focuses on the humanity of our veterans and the need they have to talk about their experience without necessarily and automatically being labeled as mentally ill. This quote from her publisher's promotional material says it well



"Caplan proposes an alternative: that we welcome veterans back into our communities and listen to their stories, one-on-one. (She provides guidelines for conducting these conversations.) This would begin a long overdue national discussion about the realities of war, and it would start the healing process for our returning veterans."

As I considered her proposals I was reminded of the subject of Dr. Shannon French's talk at our annual conference this year (see below). Dr. French emphasized the need we have to care for the warrior's conscience. Her own expertise in the history of warfare and the ethical implications of how wars are fought for both warriors and society leads to similar concerns to those expressed by Caplan. Dr. French challenged us to consider how our veterans are able to return and deal with their own experiences after having served on the field of battle.

I encourage all who take these challenges seriously to consider how you can increase your efforts in welcoming our veterans home. To this end I commend to you resources available from the [National Chaplain Center](#) of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The VA chaplains play a critical role within the VA system in contributing to a healthy perspective on spirituality in the overall effort to provide for our veterans. To this end they have accumulated and published on their web site a [series of documents](#) which spiritual communities can use in formulating their own plans on assisting the veterans in their midst.

As one example, the "[Resources for Clergy](#)" document provides eleven pages of resources which ministers may consult to help them understand resources and procedures which may be useful in developing or enhancing outreach and care for veterans. The "[Pastoral Care Approaches to Individuals After War](#)" document provides straightforward guidelines for counseling how to's and how not to's along with challenges from which every pastor can benefit in considering ministry to this very special group of people. When you visit the site you will see several other useful documents as well.

This week as you are roaming the internet please take some time to acquaint yourself with the VA website and the resources it has to support your ministry. And also, please consider your role in welcoming our veterans home.

Collegially,
John Murdoch



NCMAF Chaplain Endorser Survey

[Calling All Chaplains –](#)

The National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces consists of over 100 member organizations. All of us have as common goals recruiting, endorsing and providing ongoing oversight of persons for service as chaplains in the armed forces. We exist to do the best we can to support and enhance chaplain ministries. We need your help to tell us what we can do better. As recipients of our service, we value your opinions, input, and suggestions. Now is your opportunity.

To assist in this primary goal we invite for the *first time ever* all currently serving chaplains to participate in a brief survey (15 to 20 minutes) designed to help us help our endorsers. Whether you are in the active or reserve component, the National Guard, or a Chaplain Candidate Program Officer, we want your participation and feedback.

The survey may be accessed at [NCMAF Chaplain Endorser Survey](#). If you are not familiar with Survey Monkey, it is an internet service which permits organizations like ours to administer and collate surveys. You need not be concerned about viruses or malware as *SurveyMonkey.com* is a legitimate and widely used resource.

The Executive Committee of NCMAF has participated in development of and approved this survey.

Your completion of this survey is, of course, voluntary and your answers and comments will be completely confidential. No results will be accumulated regarding specific endorsers or specific faith groups. The results of the survey will be used in a cumulative manner and will hopefully help all our members as well as the wider faith communities of our nation provide enhanced religious ministry service to the Armed Forces.

Your participation is vital to the success of this project and will help everyone engaged in military chaplaincy. Please go to [NCMAF Chaplain Endorser Survey](#) and complete the survey at your earliest opportunity.



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Annual Conferences

Upcoming NCMAF and ECVAC 2012 Conference Dates

National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces (NCMAF)

- Monday, January 9, 2012
 - New NCMAF Endorser Training 12:30 PM – 4:30 PM
- NCMAF Annual Conference – January 10 – 11, 2012 –

Endorsers Conference for Veterans Affairs Chaplaincy (ECVAC)

- ECVAC Annual Conference –Wednesday, January 11, 2012

All above sessions will be held at the Hilton Alexandria Mark Center Hotel in Alexandria, Virginia. The Armed Forces Chaplains Board (AFCB) will host their all endorser meeting on Thursday, January 12.



"From the Hearts of Chaplains to the Souls of Warriors"

By [Shannon E. French](#), Ph.D., Inamori Professor in Ethics, Inamori International Center for Ethics and Excellence, Case Western Reserve University

Selected Excerpts

Ideally, the motivation for individual warriors to fight with honor should have both external and internal elements. The values of the culture that the warriors represent should include respect for human dignity and basic human rights and the warriors themselves should care whether or not their actions are consistent with those values. We may blame a whole society if they do not cherish such core values. But if these foundational values do exist in a society and its warriors violate them without shame, then their moral wellbeing is as much in jeopardy as was that of the great Achilles in Homer's *Iliad*.

All of the reasons for restraint I have considered thus far are in a sense external to our warriors themselves. Yet the most compelling reason for warriors to accept restraint may be the internal moral damage they risk if they fail to do so. The nature of the warrior's calling places him or her in peculiar moral peril. Most warriors come from societies that generally value human life and prohibit killing. But as warriors they are given a mandate to kill on their society's behalf. The power to kill with impunity and possibly even to dominate entire foreign cultures could certainly corrupt character and promote hubris. Warriors need the restraint of a warrior's code to keep them from losing their humanity and their ability to enjoy a life worth living outside the realm of combat.

Every warrior we send into combat on our behalf risks moral damage. We send them into hell, and we owe it to them to help them find their way back again. We must encourage them to set standards of behavior for themselves, accept certain restraints, and even "honor their enemies." In this way, warriors can create a lifeline that will allow them to pull themselves out of the hell of war and reintegrate themselves into society, should they survive to see peace restored. A warrior's code may cover everything from the treatment of prisoners of war to oath keeping to table etiquette, but its primary purpose is to grant nobility to the warriors' profession. This allows warriors to retain both their self-respect and the respect of those they guard.

It's not an easy journey, but it is an essential one. The military as an institution is not yet even fully comfortable admitting that warriors may suffer psychological damage – let alone spiritual damage. But families, loved ones, and you, their chaplains, know this is all too real. I am reminded of this passage from Frank Delaney's stirring novel *Shannon*, about Marines in the Battle of Belleau Wood in 1918:

"Only sinners lose their souls, it's said, through the evil that they do. Not [Captain] Robert Shannon. Incapable of anything but good, he lost his soul through savagery that he witnessed, horrors that he saw. When you lose – or have ripped from you – the spirit that directs you, you have two options. Fight for your soul and win it back, and you'll evermore be a noble human being. Fail, and you die from loss of truth."

We already ask mothers and fathers to sacrifice their children's *lives* for their country. We have no right to ask them to sacrifice their sons and daughters *souls*, as well.

Editor's note: Dr. French's entire talk may be found [here](#).



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Chaplaincy News

U.S. Senate Passes Resolution for Jewish Chaplains Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery

Just in time for Memorial Day, the U.S. Senate passed the necessary resolution to place a memorial to fallen Jewish chaplains in Arlington National Cemetery, next to existing memorials to Roman Catholic and Protestant chaplains. A similar resolution passed the House week. JWB Jewish Chaplains Association, has led the as a longstanding wrong. Rabbi Harold Robinson, Chaplains Council. “We’re Anthony Wiener and Jeff Schumer, Richard Burr, and leadership on this issue. will be brought home to their Robinson added, “As are grateful to all military servicemen and women.”

N.Y. Representative Senator Charles Schumer House of Representatives and memorial. Florida Washington Senator Murray services committees in the Senator Richard Burr of Republican on the Senate

The next step is design by the U.S. the Commission meets in weeks for fabrication, the different communities, giving learn more about the role of have the dedication in Arlington

150th anniversary of Jewish chaplaincy. The first Jewish chaplain was commissioned in 1862, in the midst of the Civil War. The JFNA, Jewish War Veterans, and the Sons of the American Legion were among the many communal organizations that worked tirelessly to get the resolution passed. The project was initiated when Ken Kraetzer’s discovered that Jewish chaplains were not memorialized on Chaplains Hill in the same way as others. A member of Squadron 50 of the Sons of the American Legion, in Pelham, N.Y., Kraetzer was doing historical research on memorials in Rhode Island. He was familiar with the story of the *USS Dorchester*, which the American Legion focuses on annually in commemorations all over the country, and wondered why Rabbi Goode was not among those listed at Arlington. One of the transformational moments in American life was the heroic sacrifice of the four chaplains of the *USS Dorchester*, which was transporting 900 soldiers and civilian workers to the European front when it was sunk by German torpedoes off the coast of Greenland on February 3, 1943. Each of the four chaplains on board spontaneously gave his lifejacket to another soldier, and the chaplains perished together as they prayed and sang hymns to men in lifeboats and in the icy water. The chaplains represented three faith traditions—two Protestants, a Catholic, and a Jew—and their death marked the first time the term “Protestant, Catholic and Jew” was used to describe America. Three of the four are memorialized on Chaplain’s Hill, but neither Rabbi Alexander Goode nor any of the other rabbis who died in other active service situations are so remembered.



of Representatives earlier in the Council, a division of JCC effort to correct what was seen “We are immensely gratified about to be corrected,” said director of JWB Jewish deeply grateful to Congressmen Miller and Senators Charles Patty Murray for their Finally, these fallen chaplains comrades in ministry.” Memorial Day approaches, we chaplains who serve our

Anthony Weiner and N.Y. introduced resolutions in the the Senate to authorize the Representative Miller and are chairs of the veterans House and Senate, respectively. North Carolina is the ranking committee.

approval of the monument’s Commission of Fine Arts when June. After approximately six plaque will go on tour to people a chance to see it and Jewish chaplains. JWB hopes to during the fall to commemorate the

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[Joint Base Lewis-McChord Soldier first, only active-duty Buddhist chaplain in Army](#)

JOINT BASE LEWIS-MCCHORD, Wash. May 12, 2011 By [Marisa Petrich/Northwest Guardian](#)

Of all the branch insignia on uniforms at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., one stands out for a unique reason. Chaplain (Capt.) Somya Malasri's dharma wheel is one of the most uncommon symbols in the military.

He is the first, and currently only, active-duty Buddhist chaplain in the Army. Now with the 593rd Sustainment Brigade at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Malasri is facing the challenges of being a good Soldier, a good Buddhist and a good leader to the Soldiers he came to help. "It's good to be different. We can all connect to each other," he said.

Originally from Thailand, Malasri entered a Theravada Buddhist temple near Phuket when he was 17 to study Buddhism and meditation. At 21, he became a fully ordained monk, and entered Mahachula Buddhist University to earn his bachelor's degree.

While he was there, he taught Buddhist philosophy and history to students, and did missionary work in China and India. He eventually became interested in a missionary program that sent monks further abroad.

He applied and was selected from among 200 candidates to go to the United States, serving at temples in Colorado, Utah and Las Vegas. This was where he encountered his first American Soldier.

While working at a temple near Salt Lake City, a Buddhist Soldier came to Malasri for a blessing before he deployed. Later, while he was working at a temple in Las Vegas, Malasri met another Soldier who told him there were no Buddhist services available on base. From there, the decision was made.

"OK, I want to be a chaplain," Malasri said of his thoughts at the time.

In 2005, Malasri applied to be a chaplain. Though he had to wait for an endorsement from the Buddhist Churches of America for his application to be accepted, he didn't wait to jump into Army life.

Instead he disrobed as a monk and enlisted to get an idea of what it was like to be a Soldier. In the Theravada tradition, one cannot be a monk and a Soldier at the same time.

In 2006 his application was accepted and he went on to earn his master's degree and become an ordained Buddhist minister in Los Angeles.

Now that he's a fully-fledged chaplain at JBLM, he doesn't regret his decision to leave life as a monk.

"Now I'm happy because I can serve more people," Malasri said.

Part of his service to others includes providing weekly Buddhist services on base. Spc. Lawrence Ross, 593rd Sust. Bde., attends regularly.

"(It gives me) a sense of belonging, where a group can connect without any animosity of judging," he said.

Ross, who became a Buddhist in 2008, says that it has helped him become a better Soldier and that having a Buddhist presence on base helps people see another side of the Army.

"It's not all about kicking down doors and killing people," he said. "It's all about helping people. Bottom line."

This is a sentiment Malasri agrees with. He says he gets asked a lot how he balances being a leader of a famously peaceful religion and being in the armed services. For him, even the least aggressive of people must be able to defend themselves, their property and their rights.

If you don't have a Soldier, you don't have freedom to practice your own religion," he said. Protecting this diversity is important to Malasri.

"We cannot have only one religion," he explained. "For example, we have five fingers. They're all different but they all work together."



Chaplain (Capt.) Somya Malasri, 593rd Sustainment Brigade, was a monk in Thailand before disrobing to join the Army. Malasri is the first and only active-duty Buddhist chaplain.



The silver color dharma cakra Buddhist branch insignia on Malasri's beret is among the most uncommon symbols in the U.S. military.

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[**Military's first Hindu chaplain brings a diverse background**](#)

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By [CHRIS CARROLL](#) Stars and Stripes Published: June 2, 2011

WASHINGTON — As a child in New Delhi and other cities of India's northern Plains, Pratima Dharm moved easily through a kaleidoscopic swirl of religions and cultures.

"My neighbors were Muslims, my neighbors were Jews, Buddhists, Jains, Hindus, Christians," she said. "My close friends in school represented all the different faith groups, and it never occurred to me then that we were different or there was anything strange about it."

She feels the same decades later. The U.S. Army, where she holds the rank of captain, and the United States itself, where she immigrated just months before the 9/11 attacks, were founded on the idea that people can be united while worshipping differently, she said.

Dharm, 40, has been named the first Hindu chaplain to serve the Department of Defense. Hinduism, with nearly a billion adherents worldwide — but fewer than 1,000 active servicemembers, according to Pentagon statistics — was the largest of the world faiths not represented by a chaplain.

Though the Army hasn't yet publicized her appointment, the rumor has spread among Hindu servicemembers around the world. And Dharm, a chaplain on the medical staff at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, has started getting emails from them.

"I'm already on the job," she said. "There's this tremendous sense of hope and relief that there is someone who understands their story at a deeper level, coming from the background I do."

Still, most of her time at Walter Reed is spent reaching across faiths to minister to anyone who needs it. That's a key responsibility of military chaplains, she said.

"Some of them come back having lost their buddies, some of them come back having lost their limbs, and things have changed for them forever," she said. "To be able to sit down and show compassion for soldiers I have never met before is part of the message of Christ as well as [the Hindu teachings] of Vedanta."

Dharm speaks easily of Christian teachings. A unique aspect of her story is that until this year, she wore the cross of a Christian chaplain on her battle fatigues. When she started on active duty in 2006, she was endorsed by the Pentecostal Church of God, based in Joplin, Mo.



Pentagon Action Team shown from From Left to Right: Mrs. Gidwani, Mr. Gidwani, Dr. Sadananda [Chinmaya West Priest], Lt Col Ravi Chaudhary, Chaplain Pratima Dharm, Dr. Bhat

But she's now sponsored by Chinmaya Mission West, a Hindu religious organization that operates in the United States. A Washington, D.C.-area religious teacher who interviewed her for the organization before giving her an endorsement said her multifaith background is an advantage.

"She knows Christian theology, and she has a great grasp of Hindu theology," said Kuntimaddi Sadananda of Chinmaya Mission's Washington center. "This means she can help everyone."

She didn't convert from Christianity to Hinduism, she said.

"I am a Hindu," she said. "It's how I was raised and in my heart of hearts, that's who I am."

But — and perhaps it is hard for some Western Christians to understand — she hasn't rejected Christianity either.

"In Hinduism, the boundaries are not that strict," she said. "It is to base your life on the Vedantic traditions, and you can be a Christian and follow the Vedantic traditions."

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An Indian-American Army Reserve veteran said that during his years in the service, he was always comfortable meditating in Christian services and talking to non-Hindu chaplains about spiritual matters.

"Hinduism has a strong interfaith philosophy," said Chaturbhuj Gidwani.

But having a Hindu chaplain available, even if only by email, will make one important group very happy — military mothers who want to make sure their children can practice their faith properly. Sometimes that means explaining cultural fine points.

"Mothers would ask, can you give proper rites to the soldiers?" he said. "For example, if I die, I don't want to be buried, I want to be cremated. I don't want to eat beef, I want vegetarian food."

The Air Force officer who led the Pentagon action group that established Chinmaya West as a chaplain endorsing agency said Dharm's story is testimony to American pluralism and democracy.

"I get emotional when I talk about it," said Lt. Col. Ravi Chaudhary, a cargo plane pilot and acquisitions officer. "When you consider Pentagon bureaucracy ... when people here saw that in a fundamental way this is an expression of American values, people moved so quickly to accomplish this."

Dharm spent a year at a forward operating base near Mosul, Iraq, in 2007 and 2008. She received a Bronze Star and an Army Commendation Medal, among other awards, but the most important thing she came home with was a deeper understanding of what Army chaplains are there for.

It isn't to advocate for their own faiths, but to bind up the wounded spirits soldiers of any background receive in the brutality of battle.

"You learn to grieve with someone you don't know on a deep level," Dharm said. "You watch someone die in front of you and comfort the soldier left behind who had a connection to that person."

"Things of that nature you don't learn in seminary."

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Chapels excel after joint basing

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska *Posted 5/9/2011 Updated 5/10/2011* by Staff Sgt. Jeremy Larlee JBER Public Affairs

The former Elmendorf Air Force Base and Fort Richardson joined together to form Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson July 30, 2010.

It is a transformation which has taken a lot of work, but now, less than a year later; the benefits are starting to show for many work centers.

Air Force Master Sgt. Eric Martin, the superintendent of chapel operations, said there were many challenges to overcome at the start.

"It was a tough adjustment for us especially financially," he said. "Our biggest challenge was the cultural differences."

He said the two services had different ways of doing things and the chapel's leadership made every effort to ensure most of the programs lived on under the one umbrella of joint basing.



He said despite their differences, when it came to the big picture of the chapel mission, both services were on the same page.

"Taking care of people is our number one priority and we have been successful at that," said Martin.

"It is a core value that both the Air Force and Army 100 percent agreed on."

Martin said he saw how strong joint basing had made the chapel during the aftermath of the crashes of the F-22 Raptor and the C-17 Globemaster III.

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He said there were Army chaplains lined up and down the hallways of the chaplain center ready to pitch in. "During the crashes you wouldn't know the difference between who was an Air Force person and who was an Army person," he said.

"They stepped up and asked what we needed. I don't think that would have happened like that before joint basing."

There have been other successes as well.

Martin said the Protestant Religious Education program has been a program which has bloomed since it was moved over to the Army side of the installation.

Another benefit has been seen in the religious education director position. The Air Force had always giving those duties to an active duty military member.

With the high deployment rates in the career field it often meant the person in charge of the program was gone for half of the year.

The Army contracts that position to a civilian employee.

Martin said having a person in charge of the program that is here for the whole year has been a great benefit to the program.

The sergeant said to prepare for the merger, chapel leadership looked at how other joint bases handled the transition. In some cases the chapel here has had to trailblaze its own path.

He said with every decision the spiritual welfare of Arctic Warriors is kept in the forefront.

"This is our family and we take care of it regardless of the uniform they are wearing," he said.

"If it is something that is for the best of the joint base community we are going to press forward with it."



[Health providers, chaplains discuss behavioral health in Lilongwe, Malawi](#)

20 April 2011 — By Rich Bartell, U.S. Army Africa Public Affairs

VICENZA, Italy – Maj. David Sensiba, behavioral health deputy director, European Regional Medical Command (ERMC), and Chaplain (Maj.) Allen Staley, world religions chaplain, U.S. Army Africa (USARAF), traveled to Kamuzu Barracks in Lilongwe, Malawi, recently to meet with more than 30 health care providers and chaplains of the Malawi Defence Force (MDF) to exchange information on military behavioral health.

Sensiba said the purpose of the exchange was to increase respective understanding while building partnership and capability between the two organizations.

"We shared with them what we do in the area of behavioral health care for U.S. Soldiers and Families, with particular emphasis on deployment cycle support, and they shared what they do," Sensiba said. "This dialogue was very productive and timely, thanks to lessons learned from U.S. deployments and the MDF's role in Peacekeeping operations in Africa," he said.

Staley described the chaplain role as one of cooperation and team work.

"We discussed the strong partnership between the chaplaincy and medical behavioral health care providers, as members of the same professional team in the interests of providing the best care to MDF soldiers and families," he said.

Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Fr. Meke Banda, MDF deputy chief of chaplains, said that this is the first time they have been able to meet to discuss mutual relationship as caregivers, and learn how to provide the best care to MDF soldiers and families.

The information exchange was requested by Dr. (Brig. Gen.) A. Chitsa Banda, director of the Malawi Military Health Services, and coordinated further by Maj. Terry Clark, director of medical Theater Security Cooperation, and medical planner from USARAF Command Surgeon's Office.



Chaplain (Maj.) Allen Staley (left to right), U.S. Army Africa world religions chaplain; Maj. Justus Mulolo, a Malawi Defence Force medical provider; and Maj. David Sensiba, behavioral health deputy director, European Regional Medical Command; pause for a photo during the recent information exchange in Lilongwe, Malawi. Photo by U.S. Army Africa. [VIEW MORE PHOTOS FROM MALAWI](#)

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“If we as care providers and chaplains don’t understand what we are dealing with in light of the challenges coming our way, we can be the first to fall sick,” Banda said. “We must learn and work together as mental and spiritual health multipliers,” he said.

After participating in the exchange, John Ice, U.S. Embassy Political Officer in Malawi, summed up the essence of the exchange as the beginning of a journey working together to provide better behavioral health services for members of the MDF.

The behavioral health chaplain exchange mission was a precursor to the upcoming MEDREACH 11 exercise to be conducted this May.

“The U.S. behavioral health staff won’t be available for MEDREACH 11, so it was critical to have these discussions now,” Clark said.

“A USARAF chaplain team will participate during an academics phase of the exercise to discuss combat and operational stress control,” Staley said.



Lives changed by Pacific Partnership; special needs school receives donations

By: Lt. Cmdr. Robert S. Thoms

ESPIRITU SANTO, Vanuatu – Amphibious transport dock ship USS Cleveland, the first U.S. Navy ship anchored in Luganville Bay since World War II, and New Zealand multi-role vessel HMNZS Canterbury moored pier side have their crews working non-stop as part of the Pacific Partnership 2011 humanitarian assistance mission here in Vanuatu.

Pacific Partnership 2011 runs April 28 - May 9. The medical, dental and engineering projects, as well as community service events at local schools and churches, includes representatives from Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand, and the United States.

“We and our hosts are very pleased with our progress thus far here in Vanuatu,” said Capt. Jesse A. Wilson, commander, Destroyer Squadron 23 and mission commander of Pacific Partnership 2011. “While Vanuatu and the U.S. share a history dating back to World War II, this is the first time we have had the opportunity to include Vanuatu as a key Pacific Partnership nation. It is especially gratifying to know we are truly impacting the lives of our host in meaningful ways like today at the Frangipani School, where we delivered several bikes, sporting equipment and school materials for the children who call this school home.”

“You rarely have the opportunity to truly impact peoples lives like we have here today,” said Lt. Phillip Ridley, Pacific Partnership chaplain and director of community service events. “Hugs and thanks were given by kids and adults alike.”

The bikes and other materials were part of a humanitarian assistance donation of wheelchairs and walkers by Project Handclasp and Pacific Partnership 2011 in an effort to provide support for underserved communities here in Espiritu Santo. U.S. Navy sailors, New Zealand Defense Force soldiers and local ni-Vanuatu community members built the bikes after they were donated to the school. Within hours, the kids were riding, laughing and playing on the Nakamal soccer field.

Tony and Dorian Maliutis are the school directors and they worked closely with the Pacific Partnership team to ensure this day would happen for the kids of Frangipani.

The Frangipani School is the only special needs school on the Island of Santo, and the many goods and special hand-pedaled bikes were an instant hit with the students and instructors. The school has more than 75 kids that it provides services and schooling for the coming year. The children can now ride a bike – many of them for the first time in their lives.

In Espiritu Santo, partner nations and non-government organizations of Pacific Partnership engaged in engineering, dental, medical and veterinary civil assistance projects and subject matter expert exchanges designed to increase



U.S. and New Zealand members of Pacific Partnership 2011 deliver a pull wagon for children donated by Project Hand Clasp and Later Day Saints during a Community Relations Project in the Port Olry village on the Island of Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu during Pacific Partnership 2011. (Photo by: Petty Officer 1st Class Eli J. Medellin)

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interoperability between host nations and partner nations. The multi-national team is also developing sustainable solutions for environmental and social challenges in the region.

Pacific Partnership is an annual humanitarian assistance mission sponsored by the U.S. Pacific Fleet, designed to enhance relationships in the region and interoperability with partner nations.

'Ministry on the Fly': National Guard's Office of the Chaplain Reaches Out to Flood Fighters on Duty

By Spc. Jess Raasch

VALLEY CITY, N.D. — The North Dakota National Guard Office of the Chaplain plays an active role in keeping up the morale of guardsmen across the state during this year's flood.

Chaplains visit service members on duty to check working conditions and morale. They then relay this information back to the command so any changes that need to be made to improve those conditions can be done.

"The longer the activation, the more personal issues guardsmen are going to have to deal with," said Capt. Brock Sailer, chaplain, who has been working with soldiers in Valley City. "So far, everybody is very optimistic."

Because the guardsmen have been activated for an emergency, it can be hard to find times to hold church services and gatherings. Guardsmen work 12-hour shifts, so many simply don't have the energy for extra activities.

To make up for this, chaplains deliver daily devotionals to the guardsmen at their duty locations so they can still have spiritual support, even if they can't make it to a church service. Chaplains have even delivered Bibles on MP3 so guardsmen can listen while on breaks.

"It really is ministry on the fly," Sailer said. "We have to find them, be it at meal times or helping them with their jobs, so we can work and talk at the same time." Sailer has helped sandbag dikes and has walked numerous stretches of dikes with the dike patrollers. He says it is important to let them know you are there for them, and part of that is to work side by side with them.

"The chaplains are here to ensure we are squared away physically and mentally and to help any of us who have hardships while activated," said Spc. Heidi Mittleider, of the 957th Engineer Company in Bismarck. Those hardships can include making connections to assist with missed classes or work, but it also may mean simply offering a snack or hot cocoa in the middle of a long shift.

Lt. Col. William Ziegler, state chaplain for the North Dakota National Guard, has done just that, as have Angie Christensen and Jane Johnson, licensed social workers employed to assist guardsmen and their families through the Office of the Chaplain.

"We are here because it's important for soldiers to take care of themselves spiritually, not just physically," Ziegler said. "It's all about building that bond so they know they can rely on us."

Ziegler and his team have traveled the state to visit troops activated for flood duty, making sure worship services are available and morale stays high. This may mean providing water for dike patrollers or walking the dikes with the guardsmen to make the time pass faster.

"It's all about the relationship we are trying to build, making sure they understand that we care about them during the time they spend away from their families," said 1st Lt. Scott Noyes, chaplain candidate. "We have to encourage them in the efforts they are making in each of these communities."

As Easter Sunday approaches, arrangements for services have been made for guardsmen across the state who will be on flood duty during the holiday. Maj. Gen. David Sprynczynatyk, North Dakota adjutant general, will join guardsmen in Valley City and Lisbon for Easter Sunday.

Many communities, however, have sent warm invitations to guardsmen on duty in their areas to attend church services alongside them in their towns. The community members say they are happy to have the guardsmen there protecting property and lives, and would be grateful to spend time with them since the guardsmen are away from their families.



Capt. Brock Sailer, chaplain, helps haul sandbags in Valley City, April 17.. (Photo by Spc. Jess Raasch)



Senior Airman Jeremy Jedlicka and Senior Airman Nathan Svenkerud, both with the North Dakota Air National Guard, walk and talk with Jane Johnson, a licensed social worker for the Guard, April 6. Since flood operations began this spring, chaplains and social workers employed by the North Dakota National Guard Office of the Chaplain have been checking on soldiers and airmen and ensuring things are going OK after they've left their jobs and studies to help their communities.

News You Can Use

Childhood Sexual Abuse Survivors and Victims of Military Sexual Trauma

People are in line to help you

Published on April 13, 2011 by [Catherine McCall, MS, LMFT](#) in [Overcoming Child Abuse](#)

The month of April has lured me into the agonizing terrain of US military personnel suffering the internal wounds of war and sexual assault by their own comrades. It began several weeks ago when my husband and I attended a Theater of War Productions performance of *Ajax and Philoctetes* at Emory University. It was a nerve-wracking evening of loud, crackling thunder and violent storms, as a tornado-producing front moved through the Atlanta area. But that seemed fitting somehow; symbolic- the thunder, a sound of bombs and the torrential rain, a relentless flood of inconsolable tears - as we gathered with performers and a small audience in Emory's Cannon Chapel. Together, we all participated in an emotional and intellectually stimulating theatrical experience of a Greek play designed to be a catalyst for discussions about the challenges faced by military service members, Veterans, and their families. I don't even like Greek plays. I only went along because my husband asked me to. But by the end of the evening I wished that everyone I knew had attended.

It was a richly meaningful experience which, I think, made all of us more attuned to the experience of war for those in battle, more aware of what it's like for them and their families when they return and more cognizant of our own "response abilities" in welcoming them back.

Over the last two weeks I've been doing research for an article I was writing about military sexual trauma(MST) for www.giftfromwithin.org, a website about PTSD. Had I not attended the Theater of War play, I doubt that I would have agreed to this project when Joyce Boaz, the director of Gift From Within, asked me to write it. Instead, I'd have turned away - it's so much easier to turn away when we're not attuned to what's going on around us.

But what's going on is this: Women *and* men in our armed services are *suffering* because they've been sexually assaulted by their own comrades. In fact, a woman who signs up to protect her country is more likely to be raped by a fellow soldier than killed by enemy fire (www.thedailybeast.com/4/11/11). The Department of Defense (DoD) Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military: Fiscal year 2010, stated that 90% of victims are women, 10% are men, the vast majority are under 25, and are from the enlisted ranks. I can't stand it. I can't stand that in addition to all of the other horrors involved with going to war, these soldiers have had to endure such profound torture and betrayal.



Perhaps because I married a West Point graduate and when we were in our early 20's we were surrounded by a military community we could rely on - a community of comrades who were committed to serving with integrity - I know how different it could have been for these young people. Perhaps because I'm an incest survivor and the dynamics of MST are *so* incestuous, I keep thinking about the victims of MST who are also survivors of childhood sexual abuse. If they'd been sexually violated as children or adolescents they've hardly had time to leave home, to become adults, to begin to recover. Though I've not yet been able to find any articles written about them, I'm sure they're out there somewhere in the pool of statistics, and my heart goes out to them, as does my hope that they'll be able to reach out for whatever help they need; that they'll be able to trust again.

There are people in line who are prepared to help. Just last week the Rape and Incest National Network (RAINN) announced that the DoD contracted with them to provide confidential, 24-hr., anywhere-in-the-world help. What do I mean by help? I mean one-on-one crisis intervention, emotional support, advice, and information by phone (877-995-5247) and also online, at www.SafeHelpline.org. I've been familiar with RAINN for several years. It's an excellent organization, and during the past year RAINN has hired new staff members and provided thousands of hours of training, just so that they can be prepared to serve MST victims. It's important to receive any medical and/or psychological treatment needed, and RAINN will be able to companion Vets in the right direction. Those who have a trusted spouse, friend, or family member, should turn to them for support as well. And the Veteran's Health Administration (VA) has developed a much more comprehensive response than what they had in years past. Now the VA's official policy is to provide veterans experiencing MST with free care for all related physical and mental health conditions.

Many Vets find comrades in healing through the internet. The following [Facebook](#) pages and websites are popular components of the recovery process:

[Facebook pages](#)

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Stop Sexual Abuse and Harassment Against Military Women
Service Women's Action Network
MRCC: supporting Survivors of Military Sexual Trauma

Websites

www.ablackrose.org

www.giftfromwithin.org

www.fatiguesclothesline.com

<http://www.mendmst.org/>

www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/pages/military-sexual-trauma.asp

In closing, I'm thinking about the MST victims who were also sexually abused as children. Their needs for healing are great and of a very sensitive, personal nature. The resources that have been put in place to help them have been created by people who care, and many of them have "been there." If you are one of the soldiers I'm thinking about, know that people are in line to help you. Reach out for that help, today.

Peace be with you, and continued healing.



Michelle Obama Asks Religious Leaders For Help With Military Families

By Adelle M. Banks Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS) First lady Michelle Obama has asked religious leaders to join her initiative to assist military families by increasing programs to support veterans and the families of military members deployed far from home.

"The faith community has been a strong bedrock for me as first lady," she told religious and community organization leaders on Wednesday (May 18). "So I would be remiss if I didn't

bring this issue to you as well, and ask for your support, your leadership, and your guidance." Obama, who launched her "Joining Forces" national initiative in April, said many congregations are already involved but that more can be done to include military families in a congregation's outreach plans.

"You don't necessarily have to be an expert in military family issues to make a difference," she said. "You can build on what you already do best."

The first lady cited youth ministries and career mentoring programs as examples where congregations could help address the needs of families of military members.

"I think this is an issue that we can all put our arms around, regardless of our party affiliation, our religious affiliation," she said. "We are all Americans, and these families need and deserve our support."

Joining Obama on a conference call were leaders from Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim organizations who work with military families on counseling, sending care packages and assisting spouses left at home with baby-sitting, snow shoveling or house repairs.



[Bibles on the battlefield](#)

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Just in time for Memorial Day, writer Nancy Kennedy has written a book compiling stories from 50 military chaplains. "Miracles and Moments of Grace" was published this May by Christian publisher Leafwood.

Kennedy used her experience as a journalist to put together the short, tightly edited narratives, told in the first person. The stories are mostly based on interviews with chaplains, with a few edited from written accounts of service in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, Vietnam and peacetime.

Hopewell Borough resident Kennedy worked as a journalist for 20 years, writing freelance articles for the New York Times as well as local publications, and producing news for the Wall Street Journal financial news database, one of the world's first electronic news organizations. When she had a child three years ago, she began looking for a job with a more flexible schedule, and she had the idea to write a book.

The idea to compile the stories of chaplains came to Kennedy when she and her husband John had one over for dinner. Air Force Chaplain Lt. Gary Ziccardi and his wife Rosalind visited the Kennedys and told them about an incident they believe was something of a Christmas miracle. Ziccardi was a chaplain at a military police correctional facility, and Kennedy sent him over some brownie mix as part of a care package, which Ziccardi asked the MP kitchen staff to make to give to the troops at a Christmas service. Ziccardi also had some gifts to distribute to the troops after the service. Though the services were usually sparsely attended, Ziccardi was surprised to be ministering to a standing-room-only crowd that day. Somehow, there were exactly enough brownies and gifts to go around, and not a single extra. He told Kennedy that chaplains have hundreds of stories like this, and Kennedy had her book idea.

To be a military chaplain, a person must be endorsed by a recognized religious organization. There are Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist chaplains in the military.

Kennedy found her interview subjects by contacting Christian and Jewish endorsing organizations and inviting current and former chaplains to share their stories. During the next year, the tales poured in from American chaplains at home or serving at far-flung military bases. She interviewed the close-by ones in person and the far-away ones over the phone.

Some of the stories she got were harrowing. New Jersey Army National Guard chaplain Joanne Martindale told Kennedy of ministering to a dying soldier on her first night in Iraq. The soldier dictated a last letter to his wife and two children as he lay dying of wounds from a roadside bomb. He closed the letter with a message to his daughter.

"I'm sorry I won't be there to walk you down the aisle on your wedding day. But know that I will be there anyway. That will be a special man, the one lucky enough to marry you," he said.

The soldier died moments later, and Martindale sent the family the bloodstained pages from her notebook where she had written the man's last words.

Martindale told Kennedy she has had 29 people die in her arms. "The chaplains sense the need to care for their military comrades," Kennedy said. "It's just so deep, and I admired it."

Some of the stories ended on a brighter note, like Army Chaplain James Blount, who, in Kosovo in 2002, walked into a barracks where a young soldier was firing his rifle, planning to go out in a homicidal and suicidal rampage. Blount sat down with the soldier and spent hours talking him into surrendering. Blount was given the Soldier's Medal for his bravery.

Whether these stories represent divine intervention or earthly human courage and compassion depends on the point of view of the reader. "You don't have to be a person of faith to appreciate the stories," Kennedy said. "I think there's something for everyone in there." Kennedy said that from talking to the chaplains, she got the impression that the spiritual lives of military service members are much the same as that of others in American society — some embrace faith, while others didn't want anything to do with religion. She said one of the chaplains told her about a group of soldiers scattering when he took a Bible out of his grenade pouch.

Kennedy was raised in the Plymouth Brethren Church and now attends Central Baptist Church in Ewing. The chaplains in the story are mostly Christian, but belong to many denominations. "Hearing these chaplains' stories was, I think, the most personally satisfying year of my career," Kennedy said. "Part of that was hearing all the experiences of people of different faith backgrounds."

Kennedy said she isn't privy to the book's sales figures yet, but that Leafwood considers it enough of a success that they have asked her to make it the first of a series. The author gave a speech at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pa., that was well received. Kennedy said that in writing the book, she gained a new appreciation for the sacrifices made by military personnel.

"Before I began writing this book, I had little contact with the military," she wrote in an e-mail. "It didn't play any role in my life or the life of anyone I knew. But, after spending a year listening to stories of military life, I gained an appreciation of the tremendous job servicemen and women are doing on our behalf. Whatever you think about war, it is a reality, and many people choose to face that reality, no matter what it means to them personally."



Journalist Nancy Kennedy gathered stories from 50 military chaplains for her book, "Miracles and Moments of Grace." (Staff photo by Diccon Hyatt.)

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Memorial Day, Every Day

One Army chaplain talks about his duty to honor the service and sacrifice of veterans at Arlington National Cemetery year-round.

By [Holly Nunn](#) | [Email the author](#) | May 30, 2011



Arlington National Cemetery, pictured on Friday, May 27, 2011, is prepared for Memorial Day weekend with flags at each gravesite. Credit Holly Nunn

Lt. Col. Keith Croom's first reaction is to crack a joke and a smile. He has the ease and charm you would expect from a man raised in the South. You probably wouldn't call him serious, and definitely not somber.

Until you bring up his job. Because there's not much funny about his job.

Croom is a chaplain in the U.S. Army, assigned as that branch's senior chaplain at Arlington National Cemetery. His office, with four chaplains under him at the rank of captain, buries more than 20 veterans or their spouses every day.

It's a physically draining job, with chaplains performing up to six funerals a day for up to two years.

"My guys are coming in from the gravesite basically just to wipe the sweat off their face and go meet with the next family," Croom said. "It's an honor and a privilege, and it's a busy one."

It's also an emotionally draining job.

Chaplains at Arlington spend a lot of their time contacting the families of the deceased, to give directions and guidance on the funeral ceremonies and to find out more about their loved one.

"It'd be very easy for the chaplain to fall into the honors [traditional military burial ceremony] out there, because it's so structured. As pastors, as rabbis, as priests, we want to personalize it," Croom said.

"These four guys are the best guys I've worked with. They're the cream of the crop. You've got to have the right people who are comfortable dealing with families in chaos, in grief. They are hand-picked to be here. They're guys that we know, mentally and emotionally, can come here and bury 1,000 people in two years."

In March, Croom conducted the burial service for the late Army Cpl. Frank Buckles, the last surviving American veteran of World War I.

Extensive education and experience prepares military chaplains for the difficult task of counseling and burying members of the armed services.

Chaplains are required to earn a bachelor's degree and go to seminary, the equivalent of a three-year master's degree program. Croom said that, typically, the long preparation of chaplains means they're older than your average officer of similar rank.

Croom, 44, is younger than most of his peers in the chaplaincy. He got a head-start on his career, seeing it as the natural result of his upbringing as a devout Southern Baptist and the son of a Green Beret.

"When I was 15 the Lord called me into the ministry. Plain as day. There's a lot of things in my life that I question. My call into the ministry is not one of them." With a laugh, he added, "And all I had ever wanted was to be a baseball player or an Army guy, whichever came first."

During college in West Palm Beach, Fla., Croom had a friend who was a Navy reservist.



Lt. Col. Keith Croom stands at Arlington National Cemetery, where he serves as the Senior Army Chaplain. Credit Holly Nunn

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"He came out of his room one day in his uniform and he was carrying a Bible. And the light bulb went off."

During his 19 years in the Army, Croom has spent most of his time at Fort Bragg in North Carolina, but has stationed at other bases across the country and in Japan. He served in a support hospital outside of Baghdad in 2003, he said, during the initial push into Iraq. In 2008, he deployed with special forces units to Afghanistan, where he lost 16 men.

Croom, who lives in Fairfax with his wife Kelly and their two sons, ages 14 and 8, has been at Arlington for five months -- long enough to appreciate the hard work that goes into honoring veterans and their families. Assignment at Arlington, Croom said, is not usually a chaplain's first choice.

"Most of the captains, they want to be with soldiers," Croom said. "They want to deploy, and they want to bring the Lord to the soldiers. That battalion is their church."

He continued: "We take very seriously laying our heroes to rest. And we appreciate the honor of it before we get here [to Arlington]. But after you get here, the more you do this, the more important it becomes."

Vietnam veteran struggles decades later

By John Ramsey Staff writer

During Jim Johnson's tour of duty as a chaplain in Vietnam, 96 soldiers in his battalion died and more than 900 were wounded.

Johnson knew many of them. He saw some take their last breath. His best friend, Frank Pina, died in a firefight.

Forty-three years later, Johnson, a retired therapist, still struggles with the mental anguish from his time in Vietnam.

He calls his illness a lifetime sentence. Johnson said he feels sure that four decades from now, many of today's war veterans will still be fighting battles in their minds.

Johnson's second book, "Combat Trauma: A Personal Look at Long-Term Consequences," was published this month. In it, he explores his own mental health and the internal struggles of 15 others he served with in the Vietnam war.

"Today, we are blindsided by nightmares, flashbacks, anger, depression, anxiety, guilt and many other symptoms of our trauma," Johnson writes.

For the project, Johnson said he chose veterans who were successful after leaving the military. The goal was to show that even if it's hidden to the public eye, war stays with the men who experience it.

"It would be so much easier if it was a physical wound," Johnson said.

For Johnson, the nightmares began less than two months after he came home. Some are still so vivid that he often feels he was just in Vietnam, on a boat in the Mekong Delta.

For decades, Johnson suppressed his emotions.

After retiring from the Army as a lieutenant colonel, he earned a master's degree in counseling at Long Island University. He worked as a therapist in Fayetteville for more than 15 years.

Still, innocuous things - such as the smell of diesel fuel - would take him back to war.

After he published a combat memoir in 2001, Vietnam veterans from across the country began talking to him about their problems. He was a counselor who had been there.

That's when Johnson's feelings began to ooze out. He stopped sleeping. He would zone out on the sofa. His friends noticed the change and told him to seek help.

The breakdown came in 2004 while Johnson was leading a team-building exercise for counselors at Snyder Memorial Baptist Church.

Everyone in the group was supposed to name a person who was significant in their lives.

Johnson - the son of a mill worker from Albemarle and a former tackle for the Wake Forest University football team - named another chaplain from Vietnam. And that's when he lost it. He sobbed and beat his fists against the table.

"I totally came unglued," Johnson said. "This was the first time I had ever really lost control over my emotions."

He was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD.



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Johnson quit his job as a counselor. He said he spent 30 days in a PTSD therapy center in New York with other veterans.

Veterans of today's wars will be living with the memories the rest of their lives, he said.

Johnson often feels like he's living as two different people.

"Sometimes, I refer to myself as Jim A and Jim B," Johnson said. "Jim B represents the nightmares, the flashbacks."

Staff writer John Ramsey can be reached at ramseyj@fayobserver.com or 486-3574.

Recruiting News

Army

ARMY CHAPLAIN RECRUITING

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Special Categories Recruiting Team (Roman Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Orthodox) Chaplain

(MAJ) Peter Dubinin

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ACTIVE DUTY CHAPLAIN RECRUITING

HQ Air Force Recruiting Service

Chaplain Corps Accessions Office

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San Antonio, TX 78150-4527

Office: 210.565.0335 DSN: 665.0335

Toll Free: 800.803.2452

Fax: 210.565.4917

Email: chaplains@randolph.af.mil

Website: <http://www.airforce.com/chaplain>

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Air National Guard
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AIR NATIONAL GUARD RECRUITER

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Navy

Navy Recruiting now has a FACEBOOK page titled "US NAVY CHAPLAIN CORPS". On it, chaplains, students, and prospective applicants for all Navy Chaplain programs can find a wealth of information, and interact with chaplains on a variety of topics.

In addition to this, the Navy Chaplain Corps has just released (7) new video clips depicting several chaplains in different ministry settings sharing their stories.

FACEBOOK: US NAVY CHAPLAIN CORPS <http://www.facebook.com/navychaplain?ref=ts>

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[Veteran's Administration Chaplain Career Opportunities](#)

All opportunities to apply for employment can be found on the [USA JOBS*](#) or at [VA Careers](#). VA has immediate openings for Roman Catholic Chaplains. Additional information can be found in the [USA JOBS Announcement for Roman Catholic Chaplains*](#).

Additional employment information:

- [How to Apply Pamphlet](#)
- [VA Chaplain Qualification Requirements and Application Procedures](#)
- [List of Ecclesiastical Endorsers](#)

F o r R e f l e c t i o n

[Atheists Seek Chaplain Role in the Military](#)

By [JAMES DAO](#). Published: April 26, 2011

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. — In the military, there are more than 3,000 chaplains who minister to the spiritual and emotional needs of active duty troops, regardless of their faiths. The vast majority are Christians, a few are Jews or Muslims, one is a Buddhist. A Hindu, possibly even a Wiccan may join their ranks soon.

But an [atheist](#)?

Strange as it sounds, groups representing atheists and secular humanists are pushing for the appointment of one of their own to the chaplaincy, hoping to give voice to what they say is a large — and largely underground — population of nonbelievers in the military.

Joining the chaplain corps is part of a broader campaign by atheists to win official acceptance in the military. Such recognition would make it easier for them to raise money and meet on military bases. It would help ensure that chaplains, religious or atheist, would distribute their literature, advertise their events and advocate for them with commanders.

But winning the appointment of an atheist chaplain will require support from senior chaplains, a tall order. Many chaplains are skeptical: Do atheists belong to a “faith group,” a requirement for a chaplain candidate? Can they provide support to religious troops of all faiths, a fundamental responsibility for chaplains?

Jason Torpy, a former Army captain who is president of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers, said humanist chaplains would do everything religious chaplains do, including counsel troops and help them follow their faiths. But just as a Protestant chaplain would not preside over a Catholic service, a humanist might not lead a religious ceremony, though he might help organize it.

“Humanism fills the same role for atheists that Christianity does for Christians and Judaism does for Jews,” Mr. Torpy said in an interview. “It answers questions of ultimate concern; it directs our values.”

Mr. Torpy has asked to meet the chiefs of chaplains for each of the armed forces, which have their own corps, to discuss his proposal. The chiefs have yet to comment.

At the same time, an atheist group at Fort Bragg called Military Atheists and Secular Humanists, or MASH, has asked the Army to appoint an atheist lay leader at the base. A new MASH chapter at Fort Campbell, Ky., is planning to do the same as are atheists at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida.

Such lay leaders can lead “services” in lieu of chaplains and have access to meeting rooms, including chapels.

Chaplains at Fort Bragg near here have seemed open to the idea, if somewhat perplexed by it.

“You’re not a faith group; you’re a lack-of-faith group,” First Lt. Samantha Nicoll, an active atheist at Fort Bragg, recalled a chaplain friend’s saying about the idea. “But I said, ‘What else is there for us?’ ”

Atheist leaders acknowledge the seeming contradiction of nonbelievers seeking to become chaplains or receive recognition from the chaplain corps. But they say they believe the imprimatur of the chaplaincy will embolden atheists who worry about being ostracized for their worldviews.

Defense Department statistics show that about 9,400 of the nation’s 1.4 million active-duty military personnel identify themselves as atheists or agnostics, making them a larger subpopulation than Jews, Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists in the military.

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soldiers, G-d forbid (oops! Even that doesn't work). Will they say, "Game over. You're going to a place of complete oblivion. Thank you for your service?"

On the other hand, I am completely opposed to any kind of religious coercion, and why should non-believing military personnel not have someone they can talk to who shares their absence of faith? If you're an atheist and you've returned from Iraq or Afghanistan and you're finding it difficult, say, to reintegrate to life back home, maybe you don't want to talk to someone whom you think views life only through the prism of faith. In the same way that it might be uncomfortable for a Jewish soldier to talk about his deepest issues with, say, a Catholic Priest, it is arguably just as uncomfortable for an atheist soldier to talk to the same Priest.

Still it would seem that those who profess an absence of belief can't really be religious or spiritual chaplains. If you're an atheist then what you see is what you get. There is no other reality – higher *or* lower – and the word spiritual is nothing but a crude con.

I am well aware that many of my atheist friends will tell me, "Come on Shmuley. OK, so an atheist 'chaplain' might not be able to offer the same comfort to a soldier who saw his buddy die in Iraq. He won't be able to say to him, 'Your friend is in a better place,' and we concede that telling him, 'Your friend died for a noble cause. Now he is decomposing in a dark grave from which there is no escape,' isn't as compelling as saying that he's up in heaven with the ministering angels. But why offer false comfort anyway, Shmuley? None of it is true and this is just religion once again serving as a balm for people's fear of death, a true opiate of the masses."

I get it, and I'm not here going to enter into a lengthy discussion about the afterlife, a subject I recently debated with my friend, the world-renowned atheist Christopher Hitchens, and which is available on YouTube.

But even without solving the issue of the possible effectiveness of atheist chaplains, surely if the military agrees to create them there will have to be some new name for the profession, and I would assume they would fall more under the rubric of psychologists and other professionals who try to help those in need without professing, or utilizing, any particular faith.

So. Do I think it's a good idea for the military to have atheist counselor soldiers? Sure. Let let's have trained professionals who profess atheism who are made available to non-believing service men and women who are reluctant to discuss personal issues with religious chaplains. But please, call them something that doesn't make a mockery of religion by pretending that someone can be a minister of the religion of non-belief.

Having said all this, I think it worthwhile to point out that the move on the part of atheists to create an official chaplaincy reinforces my firm belief that atheism is becoming its own religion. I will make this point at great length in my upcoming book, "The Church of Evolution," slated to come out, G-d willing, later in the year. But there are many people whose atheism is supported by their own creeds and by the same willful denial of certain facts that has in the past characterized many of the faithful. In addition, the new atheists, like Richard Dawkins, demonstrate an intolerance and condescension to people of faith that is very similar to what one sadly finds among some of the most close-minded of religious people.

So perhaps it is just as well that we formalize the new Church of Atheism by creating a formal military chaplaincy.

Rabbi Boteach's debates with atheists Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris are available on YouTube. His book-length response to the new atheists will be published later this year. Follow him on Twitter @RabbiShmuley.

Historical Note

'Bringing God to soldiers'

Memorial unveiled honoring chaplains killed in U.S. wars since 1775

By JEFF WILKINSON - jwilkinson@thestate.com

For George Jones of Hendersonville, N.C., the dedication of the new U.S. Army Chaplain Corps Memorial at Fort Jackson was more than a nice gesture to honor the corps' fallen members. It was personal.

"I knew some of the men on that wall," the 90-year-old former World War II chaplain said, sitting in front of the memorial that carries the names of 294 Army chaplains and chaplain assistants killed since the Revolutionary War, 118 of them from World War II. "We did what we needed to do at that juncture of history."

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The \$250,000, 2,500-square-foot memorial also contains a manicured lawn, garden and a fountain, as well as a statue of a chaplain comforting an agonized soldier. And while there are other memorials to individual or groups of chaplains around the globe, this memorial is the only one to include chaplains and chaplain assistants together, said U.S. Army Chaplain Center & School commandant Col. David Smartt. Fort Jackson trains all chaplains for the U.S. military.

“The names on the wall will remind us of the great price of bringing God to soldiers and soldiers to God,” Smartt said.

Since July 29, 1775, approximately 25,000 Army chaplains have served as religious and spiritual leaders for 25 million soldiers and their families. Since the Civil War, all have been volunteers, said school historian John Brinsfield.



SFC Joe Stanfield stands ready to assist in the wreath laying. Fort Jackson dedicated a memorial garden and statue in honor of the 200 chaplains and chaplain assistants who have been killed in combat, Wednesday at the United States Army Chaplain Center and School. *Kim Foster-Tobin kkfoster@thestate.com*

Army chaplains and chaplain assistants have ministered at military installations and with deployed combat units, at military schools and military hospitals.

Throughout the 236 years, Army chaplains have served in more than 270 major wars and combat engagements, according to the military.

Almost 14 percent of all Army chaplains since the Civil War have received battlefield decorations. Of these, six were awarded the Medal of Honor and 27 received the Distinguished Service Cross for valorous service beyond the call of duty.

Among the notables listed on the wall are:

- Maj. Charles Watters, a Medal of Honor recipient from World War II.

• Sgt. Larry Bowman of New York, who was killed in the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Towers in New York.

• Capt. Dale Goetz of California and Staff Sgt. Christopher Stout of Kentucky, who were killed in Afghanistan.

• Spc. Quincy Green of Florida and Maj. Henry Timothy Vakoc of Minnesota, who were killed in Iraq.

Maj. Gen. Douglas Carver, The U.S. Army Chief of Chaplains, said the memorial, in addition to being a hallowed place of reflection, will be a reminder to students of the seriousness and importance of their service.

“This gives them the opportunity to hear the sacred stories,” he said. “And it gives us the opportunity to show where we have been and where we are going.”



Kapaun considered for Medal of Honor

Congressman Mike Pompeo testified April 14, asking Congress to waive the time limitation and award the Medal of Honor to Father Emil Kapaun.

Recommendations must be submitted within two years of the action. In this case, Kapaun’s heroic actions took place in 1950 and 1951, when the Catholic priest was a chaplain in the Korean Conflict.

In Pompeo’s testimony, he read the official report: “Chaplain Kapaun repeatedly risked his own life to save hundreds of fellow Americans. His extraordinary courage and leadership inspired thousands of prisoners to survive hellish conditions and resist Chinese indoctrination. His actions reflect great credit upon himself, the 1st Cavalry Division, and the United States Army.”

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Because of Kapaun's extraordinary efforts, the Army posthumously awarded him the Distinguished Service Cross on Aug. 18, 1951.

The decorated Army chaplain is a candidate for sainthood by the Catholic church.

Born in Pilsen, Kapaun Conception Abbey Seminary and Missouri. In 1940, he was ordained chaplain at Herington Army Airfield Kapaun began serving full-time in was stationed in India until the war discharged, and returned to religious

In September 1948, Kapaun the 1950 invasion by North Korea Korean battlefield with his unit, the Regiment, of the 1st Cavalry

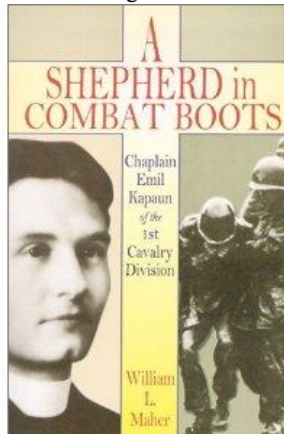
Following the regiment's Battle of Unsan, the Chinese Army

Although the Americans assault, they found themselves surrounded by enemy troops. Despite the day rescuing friendly wounded battalion perimeter.

Though able-bodied men were ordered to escape, Kapaun decided to stay behind with the wounded. As he cared for his men, he noticed a wounded Chinese officer among the group. As Chinese infantry approached the American position, Kapaun convinced the officer to negotiate the safe surrender of the American forces.

After being captured, Kapaun continued to stoically encourage and support his men. As they marched to a prison camp, Kapaun noticed a Chinese officer preparing to execute a wounded American Staff Sergeant. Kapaun pushed the Chinese soldier aside and hoisted the American to his feet, assisting him for the next several days as the prisoners marched north to Pyoktong.

The prisoners were in a weakened state as they were forced to march to different camps. Kapaun encouraged his men, led by example, and refused to take a break from carrying stretchers for the wounded. He further risked his life by sneaking out after dark to forage for food and steal rations from guards, which he distributed among the prisoners.



graduated from Pilsen High School, attended Kenrick Theological Seminary in Wichita. Originally an auxiliary at the beginning of World War II, the military chaplaincy in 1944 and ended. He returned to the U.S., was studies.

re-enlisted in the Army. Shortly after into South Korean, Kapaun entered the 3rd Battalion of the 8th Cavalry Division.

withdrawal Nov. 1 and 2, 1950, at the encircled the battalion.

successfully repelled the enemy defending a small perimeter, entirely continuing enemy fire, Kapaun spent from the no-man's land outside the

Prisoners began to die because of their weakened and malnourished state. Eventually, captivity began to take its toll on Kapaun. A large blood clot formed in his leg. The Chinese, wary of Kapaun's influence over the other prisoners, refused to provide medical aid. Though he recovered from the blood clot, he became ill with pneumonia shortly thereafter. He was transferred to a hospital, where he later died.

Kapaun would have turned 95 years old April 20.

The Department of Defense officially supports the Medal of Honor for Kapaun.

For more on Chaplain Kapaun see http://www.kapaun.org/pages/about_us/medal_of_honor.htm



In Memoriam

[Slain chaplain found his faith in Oregon](#)

By [Julie Sullivan, The Oregonian](#)

A Baptist minister who grew up in Hood River is the first Army chaplain to die in combat since Vietnam.



Chaplain (Capt.) Dale A. Goetz and wife, Christina

Chaplain (Capt.) Dale Allen Goetz, 43, died Monday (August 30, 2010) in a roadside bombing in

Afghanistan's Arghandab River Valley. He had been in Afghanistan less than a month. Four other Fort Carson, Colo., soldiers were also killed in the attack.

His mother, Hope Goetz, who lives in Colorado, traveled to Dover Air Force Base in Delaware on Wednesday to meet her son's remains, friends say.

News of the death sped through Hood River, where Goetz developed his Christian faith and love of the military while attending a small private school, Baptist Christian, now called Horizon Christian.

"He had always wanted to minister," classmate Scott Ashby said. "He had a dedication to God and country."

Goetz is the 124th service member with strong ties to Oregon to die in Afghanistan or Iraq. But as a chaplain, he was a noncombatant and unarmed.

The more than 400 Army chaplains in Iraq or Afghanistan are military officers. Their job is to reach soldiers on the battlefield, to provide religious support and to perform services or rites, said Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Carleton Birch, spokesman for the Army Chief of Chaplains.

An armed chaplain's assistant travels with each. The first assistant to die in the wars was killed in Afghanistan last month (July 2010), Birch said.

Goetz grew up in Hood River, an athlete whose first job was at an old-fashioned dairy where he processed milk and sold ice cream at a drive-up window, Ashby said.

A year before he graduated in 1986, he prayed with his principal, Oscar Stenberg III, and another student to receive Jesus Christ.

"From that point, it was like a light was on in him," Stenberg said.

Goetz enlisted in the Air Force, and then went on to Maranatha Baptist Bible College in Watertown, Wis. He graduated in 1995 with a bachelor's degree, according to the college website, and met his wife, Christina, there. He completed his Master of Divinity degree at Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Minneapolis in 2000. He was pastor of a church in White, S.D., until he joined the Army and began his work toward chaplaincy in 2000.

He served with the infantry at Fort Lewis, Wash., then three years in Okinawa, Japan, until he was transferred to Colorado in January. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 66th Armor Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, based at Fort Carson. He served 11 months in Iraq in 2004-05.

Stenberg said Goetz mailed about a month ago saying he was excited about serving soldiers but was concerned for the family he left behind.

Survivors include his wife and three children ages 10, 8 and 1. Funeral services were held in Colorado Springs, Colo., with burial at Fort Logan National Cemetery in Denver.

The Dale A Goetz Memorial Trust Fund

The Dale A Goetz Memorial Trust Fund to help Army Chaplains minister to soldiers. Bank at Broadmoor, 155 Lake Ave. Colorado Springs, CO. 80906



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[Iwakuni chaplain killed in bicycle crash](#)

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Published: May 24, 2011, By Matthew M. Burke, Stars and Stripes

SASEBO NAVAL BASE, Japan — A popular Navy chaplain died Saturday morning in a bicycle crash near Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, officials said Tuesday.

Lt. j.g. Bruce B. West Jr., 41, of Williamsburg, Va., was traveling downhill in Oze Mochigadao at around 8 a.m. when he went off the road at a turn, Iwakuni police said. West, who was cycling with a friend at the time, hit a tree and died instantly, police said.

“We’re all sad over here,” Lt. Robert Mills, deputy command chaplain at Iwakuni, said by phone Tuesday. “Bruce was a guy who lived life in full color. He was adventurous, always looking for new stuff to do and try.

“He was outgoing, and very popular. In a very short time of ministry here, he had already impacted the base for good in so many ways it’s hard to measure them.”

West was endorsed by the Evangelical Church Alliance and had a master’s degree in theological studies from Reformed Theological Seminary, Mills said. He joined the Navy in August and arrived at Iwakuni in November.

Base spokesman Master Gunnery Sgt. John Cordero said that he personally had been affected by the personable junior chaplain, who always had a smile and who quickly became a good friend.

“He had a significant impact on the community,” Cordero said. “He was a great guy. ... He always looked to serve others and he did it with joy.”

Mills said that West enjoyed being outdoors, whether it was fishing, hunting, running or bike riding. He had a “jacked up” sport utility vehicle that Mills called the “Tonka Truck.”

West was Protestant but worked with servicemembers of all denominations, Mills said.

“We’re hurt, but we’re not done,” Mills said, his voice wavering. “We’re going to continue working and sharing the legacy he left here.”

A memorial service is planned for Thursday at 10 a.m. at the Marine Memorial Chapel on base, Mills said. Friends said that West will be eulogized as someone who was dedicated to God and his family.

West is survived by his wife, Mary Ann, and three children.

Elena Sugiyama contributed to this report.

burkem@pstripes.osd.mil



Lt. j.g. Bruce B. West
COURTESY U.S. NAVY

Links You Can Use

- [Military One Source](#)
- [Military Health System](#)
- [Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD –](#)
- [The Military Chaplain's Association](#)
- [The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life](#)
- [Religious News Service](#)
- [Coalition of Spirit Filled Churches Member Groups](#)
- [Christian Reformed Church Resources for Soldiers](#)
- [J.M. Dawson Institute of Church State Studies – Baylor University](#)
- [Religion Clause](#)
- [U.S. Department of Defense – Defense Link](#)
- [Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty](#)
- [The American Legion](#)
- [Warrior Care](#)
- [Religious Diversity and Accommodation \(Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute\)](#)
- [Armed Forces Chaplains Board](#)
- [National VA Chaplains Center](#)
- [Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America](#)
- [Hooah4Health](#)

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Pass It On

Please forward this newsletter to others and consider how you can make a difference for Chaplaincy by contributing to NCMAF/ECVAC through a designated offering.

Dear Colleagues,

The number of faith communities recognized by the Department of Defense who may endorse chaplains to the military has increased over four fold since the 1950s. And there are more seeking such recognition every year. On the one hand this is exciting; on the other it is a daunting reality.

Endorsing and supporting our chaplains is not an easy task. As endorsers we all hope for the best – that our candidates and chaplains will remain true to their calling, that they will have excellent opportunities for ministry, that the commands they serve will always welcome and support their presence, and that no ill will befall them or their families in their service. And thankfully, all these conditions are true more often than we sometimes realize.

But then there are the situations in which not all that is desired is realized and then endorsing gets hard. The endorsers are a vital part of the chain to ensure ministry is provided for our service members regardless of whom they are and where they serve.

As a community we have a unique opportunity at this point in time. Earlier in this Newsletter we extended an invitation to all currently serving chaplains and candidates to tell us what how the support they receive from their endorsers could be improved. We believe this is a significant next step in furthering our mission.

Many current endorsers have served as chaplains. Some may have military experience but not as a chaplain and some have no uniformed experience at all. Regardless of previous experience, all endorsers have the same responsibilities and experience itself is not a guarantor of best practices for chaplains.

Our goal in making the survey available to your chaplains is to receive from them in a completely safe manner their views of the support they receive from their endorsers. The results will not be capable of being traced to individuals or specific endorsers. The effort is to acquire and distribute information on how current chaplains view the critical support received from the official connection to their faith community and how they think it could be improved. We intend to make this information available not only to our members but to all endorsers currently recognized by DoD. We hope in so doing to improve our work so that the work of our chaplains can flourish even more.

Please, encourage your chaplains to participate in the survey. It will take them little time or effort but the response will generate major dividends for all of us dedicated to providing quality ministry for our troops. Thank you for your encouragement and part in making this a successful exercise.

Collegially,

Jack Williamson

NCMAF/ECVAC Executive Director



Your financial support is needed!

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- ***Please let us know if you will ask your chapel or faith community to assist in our ministry.***
- ***Consider a designated or special offering to help support NCMAF and the military chaplaincy. Your financial and prayer support are both needed and appreciated.***
- ***Offerings may be sent to***
NCMAF
c/o Rebecca Waldman
7724 Silver Sage Court
Springfield, VA 22153
- ***(NCMAF is a non-profit organization authorized by the IRS to receive charitable donations)***

Please contact Jack at Jack@ncmaf.org or Lyman at Lyman@ncmaf.org for comments, suggestions, or questions concerning the Newsletter.

Please send requests for removal from the mailing list to Rebecca@ncmaf.org.

[NCMAF Chaplain Endorser Survey](#)
[For all serving chaplains and CCPOs](#)
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